

News from U.S. Representative Stephanie Herseth
For Immediate Release
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HERSETH: RISKS ARE TOO HIGH TO OPEN CANADIAN BORDER

Congresswoman Requests Oversight Hearings in House Ag Committee; Introduces Bipartisan Bill to Keep Border Closed Until Mandatory COOL is in Place

January 31, 2005 Washington, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseth recently has taken important steps to encourage the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to keep the U.S.-Canadian border closed to beef trade while our food supply and agriculture economy remain at risk. Rep. Herseth has requested oversight hearings in the House Agriculture Committee and introduced key legislation in the House to ensure that the border remain closed in the absence of country-of-origin labeling and as Canada continues to discover BSE.

Last Friday, in a letter to Chairman Bob Goodlatte and Ranking Member Collin Peterson, Herseth requested House Agriculture Committee hearings regarding the decision by USDA to allow the importation of Canadian cattle into the U.S, beginning on March 7th, even as BSE continues to be discovered within Canada (full text below). The hearings would include testimony regarding the safeguards that Canada has put in place to prevent the spread of the disease, and the appropriate effect on the March 7th deadline.

Herseth has also introduced legislation in the House that would ensure that the Canadian-U.S. border remain closed to beef trade until mandatory country-of-origin labeling is instituted. Rep. Barbara Cubin (R-WY) is an original cosponsor of her bill, which is a companion to legislation introduced by Senator Johnson. Mandatory COOL would distinguish American meat products from those that are being imported into this country and give American consumers information that they have repeatedly stated they want about the origin of the meat that they buy at the grocery store.

Herseth said, "It is unconscionable that some bureaucrats at USDA would decide to open the border amid serious questions about the safety of the Canadian beef. The safety of our food supply and the economic well-being of our producers are at stake. The border must remain closed until we are confident that the food supply is BSE-free or that we have a reliable, mandatory labeling program in place."

Herseth noted that the South Dakota delegation, as well as members of Congress from both sides of the aisle across the Northern Plains, are united in their desire to postpone the Department's timetable for opening the border.

"Like most South Dakotans, I have serious questions about the USDA's rationale for opening the border, and I look forward to posing the questions I've heard from South Dakotans in hearings in the Agriculture Committee," she said. Herseth sits on the Agriculture committee and

its subcommittee on Livestock and Horticulture.

January 27, 2005

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte, Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson, Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Goodlatte and Ranking Member Peterson,

I am writing to request a House Agriculture Committee hearing regarding the recent decision by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to allow the importation of Canadian cattle into the U.S.

On December 29, USDA announced that it had finalized a rule establishing “minimal-risk regions” for bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and that Canada is the first nation to qualify for this status. Under the minimal-risk rule, Canada would be able to export live cattle under thirty months of age into the U.S. Since USDA made that announcement, two more Canadian cattle have tested positive for BSE. The most recent discovery is particularly disconcerting because it appears the animal was born after the 1997 ruminant-to-ruminant feed ban went into effect. Despite these developments, USDA has not indicated that it will postpone implementing the rules, which are scheduled to take effect March 7.

These new BSE cases raise questions about the steps the Canadian government has taken to develop and implement regulations and safeguards to prevent the spread of BSE in its domestic cattle herd. It also is a strong indication that the rationale for the ban, which was put in place in May of 2003 in response to the initial discovery of a Canadian animal with BSE, continues to exist. I would like to hear testimony regarding the safeguards that Canada has put in place to prevent the spread of the disease. I also would like information on the oversight procedures that USDA will exercise over animals coming into the U.S. and its authority and ability to monitor Canada’s ruminant feed ban.

The policies that USDA implements regarding the importation Canadian cattle could have serious repercussions for U.S. beef producers and could affect consumers’ confidence in our domestic beef supply. For these reasons, I urge you to schedule a hearing on this matter prior

to March 7 so we might further examine these serious issues. Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Herseth
Member of Congress